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## Coercion in Rebel Recruitment

KRISTINE ECK

*Previous research on rebel recruitment has focused on the economic and social incentives groups used as enticements but has overlooked the question of why many armed groups recruit using coercion. The puzzle is why coercion occurs despite its alienating civilian populations and being costly in terms of organizational and military effectiveness. I suggest that recruitment is a dynamic process and that groups are likely to shift recruitment strategies depending on the exigencies of the conflict. In particular, the exposure of the group to military and economic shocks accompanied by shortened time horizons should lead to increasingly coercive recruitment. Whether forced recruitment is a durable solution for a group in the long run is likely to be contingent upon the group's ability to induce a high level of compliance from the individual at a low cost. Further, in order to circumvent costs vis-à-vis the civilian population, the group must be able to restrict defection to the government and the out-migration of the civilian population. Three narratives from Nepal, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone are provided both to illustrate the arguments and to probe the scope conditions. The article concludes that understanding why and when rebel groups use forced recruitment has vital security implications for the countries in which armed conflict takes place.*

“Early on when we were captured, the LRA explained to us that all five brothers couldn’t serve in the LRA because we would not perform well. So they tied up my two younger brothers and invited us to watch. Then they beat them with sticks until the two of them died. They told us it would give us strength to fight.”

Martin P., cited in Human Rights Watch (2003).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Abducted and Abused: Renewed Conflict in Northern Uganda,” Human Rights Watch, 15 July 2003, <http://www.hrw.org/reports/2003/07/14/abducted-and-abused>.

The use of coercive measures by rebel groups in recruitment is a well-known phenomenon to those who study civil war. Prominent examples of violent recruitment in countries like Liberia and Uganda abound. But not all rebel groups engage in forced recruitment; many build and sustain their organizations on voluntary participation (for example, the African National Congress in South Africa). In a sample of African rebel groups, Bernd Beber and Christopher Blattman find that approximately one-third employ coerced recruitment, raising the question of why coercive measures in recruitment are only sometimes employed by groups.<sup>2</sup> A cursory examination of most rebel groups reveals that few use violence as a means to elicit support at the outset, but that many turn to it over time. Understanding why and when rebel groups use forced recruitment has vital security implications for the countries in which armed conflict takes place. From a human rights perspective, policymakers need tools to understand and predict when civilian populations will be at risk for forced recruitment, an activity that is essentially a form of slavery. For governments interested in counterinsurgency and in providing its citizenry with physical security, it is vital to understand rebel recruitment processes and how they interact with broader conflict dynamics. Moreover, recent research has found that forcible recruitment into rebel groups is associated with higher levels of sexual violence, suggesting that recruitment mechanisms are central to understanding patterns of violence.<sup>3</sup>

Given the prevalence of forced recruitment and the vast security implications associated with its adoption by rebel groups, it is surprising that previous research has largely failed to address this topic. Instead, the civil war literature has focused almost exclusively on the material and social benefits that are used to attract voluntary recruits. Even in the child soldier literature, the focus is primarily on why children are recruited rather than whether their recruitment is voluntary or coerced. Previous research has noted that recruitment based on material benefits consumes economic resources, while recruitment based on social benefits requires investments in manpower and has assumed that violent recruitment is a cheap alternative to offering selective incentives. I argue to the contrary that violent coercion in rebel recruitment is costly. First, violently coerced rebels are likely to not be committed to the group and run a high risk for attrition, and therefore must be policed. Second, forced recruits frequently take advantage of the heat of battle to escape, which drastically reduces the group's military effectiveness. Finally, in addition to reducing the organizational and military effectiveness of the group, employing forced recruitment also risks alienating the civilian

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<sup>2</sup> Bernd Beber and Christopher Blattman, "The Logic of Child Soldiering and Coercion," *International Organization* 67, no. 1 (January 2013): 65–104.

<sup>3</sup> Dara Cohen, "Causes of Rape during Civil War: Cross-National Evidence, 1980–2009," *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (August 2013): 461–77.

population. In areas where rebels are known to use such measures, there are strong incentives for civilians to collaborate with government forces by providing information on rebel troop movements. As such, coercion provides a poor organizational base for rebellion.

Why should rebel groups then employ coercion if it is so inefficient? The aim of this article is to develop a set of theoretical propositions that could help explain this phenomenon. I suggest that the dynamics of the conflict will affect if and when a rebel group employs coercive measures in recruitment. According to this logic, whether the rebel group opts for voluntary or coercive recruitment is contingent on the military needs of the group at any given point, as the incentive structure for the rebel group to choose amongst different recruitment strategies shifts over time depending on the dynamics of the conflict, such as the outcome of battles and/or negotiations. While selective incentives in general are an optimal strategy since they result in committed rebels, military imperatives may constrain the group's ability to divert resources to voluntary recruitment. When this occurs, rebel groups will be more likely to employ coercion in recruitment. A number of situations can evoke desperation on the rebel side. For example, when fighting intensifies and rebels are losing on the battlefield, or if a rebel group needs a boost in strength, the temptation will be strong to forcibly recruit individuals to join. If the rebel group experiences a shock to its resource base—for example, the loss of access to lootable resources or the withdrawal of an external funder—this will also undermine the recruitment base and should cause the rebel group to consider more forcible options. These situations may be manageable depending on the extent to which the rebel groups experience shortened time horizons that induce them to find a solution to their manpower problem: when the need to replenish immediately is strong, the incentives for violent recruitment should be high. Thus I propose that the dynamics of conflict affect the rebel group's cost-benefit calculus for various recruitment strategies. Violent recruitment is optimal only when the situation on the ground necessitates an influx of new troops that cannot be obtained through more expensive or time-consuming recruitment processes.

The idea that forced recruitment is costly is evidenced by the fact that rebel groups rarely employ violent recruitment tactics at the outset; they are adopted only later.<sup>4</sup> But cases like the Farabundo Martí National Liberation (FMLN) in El Salvador also demonstrate that violent recruitment tactics are sometimes abandoned, and the durability of violence as a recruitment strategy is also necessarily limited by the rebels' cost-benefit analysis. Rebel groups must weigh the costs of maintaining a system of forced recruitment

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<sup>4</sup> This conclusion is based on data from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) Conflict Encyclopedia and a survey of its regional experts; see UCDP, *Conflict Encyclopedia*, <http://www.ucdp.uu.se/gpdatabase/search.php>, accessed 3 January 2012.

versus their ability to consolidate their hold over the recruit, that is, to minimize the need to police the individual and deal with the problem of attrition. I suggest that coercive tactics that incur low maintenance costs but provide high levels of compliance are most likely to be viable in the long run. But external costs vis-à-vis civilians must also be considered; the fear of falling victim to violent coercion may induce civilians to denounce rebels, providing informational advantages to governments.

A note on terminology is warranted. Recruitment, generally speaking, can be conceptualized as a continuum ranging from voluntary recruitment to forced recruitment. Coercion is a broad term that can take on a number of different connotations. Certainly coercive recruitment covers those situations where the threat of violence, whether explicit or implicit, affects an individual's decision to join. As such, coercive recruitment includes all cases of involuntary enlistment. But coercion can be conceptualized even more broadly to include all forms of pressure, be it social or psychological, that induce individuals to take actions that they otherwise would not. Tactics like social entrapment and indoctrination employ neither implicit nor explicit threats, yet they elicit participation through the manipulation of an individual. The psychological literature has shown that indoctrination tactics break down individuals' cognitive processes and result in a weakened ability to think critically and make decisions.<sup>5</sup> As such, even these weaker forms of coercion warrant attention. The thrust of this article is on explaining that rebels adopt violent recruitment because the policing and civilian costs that make coercion suboptimal are incurred when coercive recruitment takes on a violent nature. Nonetheless, it is useful to look at the broad spectrum of coercive options the group has at hand. Thus, in the following text I use the terms "violent recruitment" and "forced recruitment" to indicate when the explicit threat or use of violence is employed in conscripting individuals into a group, while "coerced recruitment" indicates the broad category of coercive tactics available to a group, both violent and nonviolent.

In the next section, I depart from previous research to discuss the problems inherent in assuming free will in civil war participation. I then move on to discuss why forced recruitment is a costly strategy. Thereafter, I address the question of why groups use forced recruitment at all if it is as costly as I posit. I then examine why coercive recruitment is sometimes abandoned by groups while other times it provides a durable solution to their manpower problem. Finally, I illustrate and challenge these arguments through three case narratives from Nepal, Ethiopia, and Sierra Leone in order to probe their scope conditions.

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<sup>5</sup> Robert S. Baron, "Arousal, Capacity, and Intense Indoctrination," *Personality and Social Psychology Review* 4, no. 3 (August 2000): 238–54.

## THE PERNICIOUS EFFECTS OF ASSUMING FREE CHOICE

Much of the literature on rebel recruitment departs from the collective action problem, the heart of which is that rebel groups fight for public goods; but the individuals involved pay private costs, creating strong incentives for rational individuals to abstain from participation and instead opt to free ride.<sup>6</sup> This problem is argued to be particularly acute in regards to rebellion since the risks associated with armed conflict are potentially enormous, and all collective benefits are highly uncertain and distributed in the future.<sup>7</sup> The rationalist solution to the free-rider problem is selective incentives, or private gains distributed only to those individuals that participate.<sup>8</sup> The literature has focused on two types of selective incentives: material and social.<sup>9</sup>

Along similar lines, economic models of rebellion have argued that individuals seek to maximize their expected income and emphasize the expected private returns that only participants can attain upon winning. In these economic models, individuals must choose whether to allocate their labor to production or to rebellion. These models find that participation in rebellion increases as opportunity costs decrease. In these models the insurgents take the revenue rulers and their clientele as booty, and it is this potential appropriation that creates an incentive for individuals to participate in rebellion.<sup>10</sup> Soldiering in many economic models is thus analogous to supply and demand concerns in the labor market.<sup>11</sup> The idea of economic incentives is perhaps most famously formulated in the “greed and grievance” literature, which argues that private material benefits are necessary to motivate rational

<sup>6</sup> Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965).

<sup>7</sup> Mark Lichbach, *The Rebel's Dilemma* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher suggest that the collective action paradigm is not necessarily central in understanding rebel recruitment since it assumes that nonparticipation is costless. They argue instead that because civilians are often victimized in war, joining rebellion is a way to minimize potential costs. Scott Gates states that many collective action problems have been overcome once a rebel group with an existing hierarchical organization exists. Stathis N. Kalyvas and Matthew Adam Kocher, “How ‘Free’ is Free Riding in Civil Wars?: Violence, Insurgency, and the Collective Action Problem,” *World Politics* 59, no. 2 (January 2007): 177–216; Gates, “Recruitment and Allegiance: The Microfoundations of Rebellion,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (February 2002): 111–30.

<sup>9</sup> Olson, *Logic of Collective Action*; Lichbach, *Rebel's Dilemma*; Samuel Popkin, *The Rational Peasant* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Gordon Tullock, “The Paradox of Revolution,” *Public Choice* 11, no. 1 (Fall 1971): 89–99.

<sup>10</sup> Herschel I. Grossman, “A General Equilibrium Model of Insurrections,” *American Economic Review* 81, no. 4 (September 1991): 912–21; Herschel I. Grossman, “Kleptocracy and Revolutions,” *Oxford Economic Papers* 51, no. 2 (April 1999): 267–83.

<sup>11</sup> See Jens Christopher Andvig and Scott Gates, “Recruiting Children for Armed Conflict,” in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, ed. Scott Gates and Simon Reich (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010); Beber and Blattman, “Logic of Child Soldiering”; Gates, “Recruitment and Allegiance.” Note that within the labor economics approach to rebel recruitment, the concept of collective goods often plays no role; for an overview of prominent civil war theories, including economic models of insurrection, see Christopher Blattman and Edward Miguel, “Civil War,” *Journal of Economic Literature* 48, no. 1 (March 2010): 3–57.

individuals to accept the private costs rebellion entails.<sup>12</sup> These economic benefits are usually envisaged as being distributed throughout the course of the fighting; it is not only the promise of the ruler's booty, but rather the booty that can be attained through fighting that provides the economic incentive. Natural resources, looting, and other forms of financial gain are argued to be a principal aim of rebels who seek to profit from the opportunities for exploitation and illegal trade that war creates;<sup>13</sup> these material benefits are seen as the motivating force behind rebellion. Numerous studies have found that countries rich in some types of natural resources are more likely to see civil war.<sup>14</sup>

At the same time, many armed conflicts take place in resource-poor countries where looting is not a principal pursuit of the rebels.<sup>15</sup> Participation in these conflicts is often argued to be driven by social incentives. This perspective views incentives in a broader sense, such as the social benefits derived from group belonging.<sup>16</sup> In such conflicts, rebel leaders take advantage of ethnic, religious, ideological, or other social bonds within aggrieved groups to appeal to individuals' loyalties to the group.<sup>17</sup> Joining the movement becomes a social good in itself; it is part of "the pleasure of agency."<sup>18</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Paul Collier and Anke Hoefler, "Greed and Grievance in Civil War," mimeo, Washington, DC, World Bank, 2001.

<sup>13</sup> Jean-Paul Azam, "Looting and Conflict between Ethno-regional Groups: Lessons for State Formation in Africa." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 46, no. 1 (February 2002): 131–53; Collier and Hoefler, "Greed and Grievance"; David Keen, "The Economic Functions of Violence in Civil Wars," *Adelphi Paper* #320, International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Philippe Le Billon, "Fueling War: Natural Resources and Armed Conflict," *Adelphi Paper* #373, IISS (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Håvard Hegre and Nicholas Sambanis, "Sensitivity Analysis of Empirical Results on Civil War Onset," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 50, no. 4 (August 2006): 508–35; Päivi Lujala, Nils Petter Gleditsch, and Elisabeth Gilmore, "A Diamond Curse?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 4 (August 2005): 538–62; Michael Ross, "How Do Natural Resources Influence Civil War? Evidence from Thirteen Cases," *International Organization* 58, no. 1 (February 2004): 35–67.

<sup>15</sup> Jeremy M. Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion: The Politics of Insurgent Violence* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Roger Petersen, *Resistance and Rebellion: Lessons from Eastern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> This line of reasoning can be found in the relative deprivation literature that posits that grievances about differential treatment and a sense of group cultural identity provide the basis for mobilization. This argument is most commonly associated with Ted Robert Gurr, but similar arguments also permeate the enormous literature on ethnic and religious conflict; Gurr, *Why Men Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970).

<sup>18</sup> Elisabeth Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Another strand of literature emphasizes the value of purposive incentives, for example internalized norms and values in which the person's self-esteem depends on doing the right thing; see Pamela E. Oliver, "Formal Models of Collective Action," *Annual Review of Sociology* 19 (August 1993): 271–300; Jeremy Ginges and Scott Atran, "What Motivates Participation in Violent Political Action?" *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 1167 (June 2009): 115–23. Other researchers underscore the importance of excitement and high levels of risk-acceptance in deciding to join a rebel group; David Keen, "Incentives and Disincentives for Violence," in *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil War*, ed. Mats Berdal and David A. Malone (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2000); Marcella Ribetti, "The Unveiled

Moreover, common norms within the group increase cooperation and reciprocity, and make leaders' promises about the distribution of benefits in the future more credible.<sup>19</sup> Such social bonds may predate conflict, such as a common ethnic or religious identity, while others may be built up during the mobilization phase; for example, many ideologically oriented groups work to develop a wider ideological identity that can be mobilized. These strategies of using economic and social incentives to attract rebels are argued to have implications for the type of rebels that join a group: individuals who join groups that offer economic incentives tend to be opportunistic "consumers" who are motivated primarily by private gains, while those who join movements characterized by social endowments are more committed "investors" who demonstrate higher levels of loyalty to the group.<sup>20</sup>

What is often forgotten is that Mancur Olson argued that in addition to material and social benefits, coercion could also be used to overcome the free-rider problem.<sup>21</sup> Since Olson, however, the topic of coercion in the context of rebellion has been largely absent from the theoretical literature. This is particularly puzzling since coercion and forced recruitment is a well-known empirical phenomenon in armed conflict. Jeffrey Herbst notes that this may be because most studies of rebellion are either focused on market analogies that have difficulty including coercion, or else they address the motivations of why men rebel, which presupposes free will in the matter.<sup>22</sup> In one of the few studies that directly addresses coercion, Herbst observes that forced recruitment has been prevalent in many African civil wars, though he offers no theoretical explanation for the phenomenon.

Scott Gates also addresses forced recruitment theoretically, noting that participation is often forced at gunpoint and that this poses a problem for the group: how should the group induce compliance from those that do not want to participate? Gates' model focuses on enforcement: given the incentive for individuals to defect, the group must ensure punishment for defection. Being able to ensure punishment is costly to the group, and the group's ability to make good on its threats is a function of geographical distance.<sup>23</sup> On an empirical level, Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein's survey of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone examines, amongst other things, the correlates

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Motivations of Violence in Intra-State Conflicts: The Colombian Guerrillas," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 18, no. 4 (December 2007): 699–720. Perhaps the most interesting approach to voluntary recruitment stresses the endogeneity of recruitment to the dynamics of war, particularly patterns of violence and victimization. See Kalyvas and Kocher, "Free Riding"; Ana M. Arjona and Stathis N. Kalyvas, "Recruitment into Armed Groups in Colombia: A Survey of Demobilized Fighters," in *Understanding Collective Political Violence*, ed. Yvan Guichaoua (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 143–74.

<sup>19</sup> Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Olson, *Logic of Collective Action*.

<sup>22</sup> Jeffrey Herbst, "Economic Incentives, Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa," *Journal of African Economies* 9, no. 3 (October 2000): 270–94.

<sup>23</sup> Gates, "Recruitment and Allegiance."

of forced recruitment in the Revolutionary United Front (RUF).<sup>24</sup> They find that common explanations of rebellion—expressive motivations, selective incentives, and social sanctions—are irrelevant for abductees. While they do not address the topic beyond this empirical observation, they conclude that understanding why groups abduct recruits is an empirical phenomenon that can no longer be ignored. Case studies of rebellion occasionally mention the use of coercive recruitment in passing, but only rarely is the practice examined in any detail. None of these works, however, address the variation in the adoption of forced recruitment.

The literature that has been most apt to acknowledge the role of coercion in recruitment relates to child soldiers. Child soldiers can be recruited both voluntarily and involuntarily, but the focus in this literature tends not to center on the recruitment strategy itself but on why rebels choose to direct their efforts toward children rather than adults.<sup>25</sup> Previous research has tended to focus on structural variables to explain the choice of child soldiers, such as poverty, education, demographics, and other environmental factors.<sup>26</sup> More recent work has moved away from static explanations, such as Vera Achvarina and Simon F. Reich, who argue that the level of security in refugee camps determines the likelihood of child soldiers.<sup>27</sup> Using survey data from Uganda, Blattman and Jeannie Annan find that young adolescents were targeted for recruitment (usually forced) for three principal reasons: they were overrepresented in the population, were more effective guerrillas than younger children, and were more easily indoctrinated than adults.<sup>28</sup> Beber and Blattman argue that because youths are more responsive to coercive tactics and therefore stay longer than adults, rebel leaders yield smaller benefits per recruit but accrue these benefits over a longer period of time, making the child abduction enterprise profitable in the long run.<sup>29</sup> They also find in a cross-sectional analysis of a sample of African rebel groups

<sup>24</sup> Macartan Humphreys and Jeremy M. Weinstein, "Who Fights? The Determinants of Participation in Civil War," *American Journal of Political Science* 52, no. 2 (April 2008): 426–55.

<sup>25</sup> Hart is critical of the assumption in much of the child soldier literature that participation is coerced and argues for a greater appreciation of the agency of children; Jason Hart, "Displaced Children's Participation in Political Violence: Towards Greater Understanding of Mobilisation," *Conflict, Security, and Development* 8, no. 3 (October 2008): 277–93.

<sup>26</sup> Rachel Brett and Irma Specht, *Young Soldiers: Why They Choose to Fight* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2004); Ilene Cohn and Guy S. Goodwin-Gill, *Child Soldiers: The Role of Children in Armed Conflict* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994); P. W. Singer, *Children at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>27</sup> Vera Achvarina and Simon F. Reich, "No Place to Hide: Refugees, Displaced Persons, and the Recruitment of Child Soldiers," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 127–64.

<sup>28</sup> Christopher Blattman and Jeannie Annan, "On the Nature and Causes of LRA Abduction: What the Abductees Say," in *The Lord's Resistance Army: Myth and Reality*, ed. Tim Allen and Koen Vlassenroot (London: Zed Books, 2010). James B. Pugel finds that in Liberia, adults were equally at risk of being abducted into armed forces as children; Pugel, "Disaggregating the Causal Factors Unique to Child Soldiering: The Case of Liberia," in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, ed. Scott Gates and Simon Reich (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010).

<sup>29</sup> Beber and Blattman "The Logic of Child Soldiering."

that forced child recruitment is most common when punishment is cheap. Achvarina finds in her study of 112 African insurgencies that groups that lack popular legitimacy and have high levels of fighting capacity, access to territory, or material capacity are more likely to recruit children, as are groups with high levels of popular legitimacy and that experience ethnic persecution.<sup>30</sup> Despite this welcome move from anecdotal, policy-oriented studies to explanations based on systematic empirical analysis, the child soldier literature focuses primarily on the question of why children and not adults are recruited and largely neglects variation in how children are recruited. It is also rare to find studies that model temporal variation in recruitment patterns.

The assumption of free will (at least for adults) found in previous research has had particularly pernicious effects for understanding participation in civil war, which is ostensibly the foundation for all civil war studies. By making this assumption, the problem of forcible recruitment never arises and researchers fail to consider when individuals participate against their will. The type of recruitment practice a rebel group employs has enormous consequences for the civilian population living in a conflict-stricken area. Indeed, the type of recruitment tactic—and especially the shifting of recruitment tactics—provides valuable information not only about the dynamics of the conflict, but also about the fundamental relationship between the rebel group and the civilian population. As such, a better understanding of rebel recruitment strategies, one that incorporates an appreciation of the often nonvoluntary nature of participation, can potentially provide a wealth of information about the trajectory of the war.

### THE PATH OF MOST RESISTANCE

All recruitment strategies involve some cost to the rebel group. Recruitment based on economic incentives necessitates access to funding as well as the willingness to divert this funding to recruitment. Similarly, recruitment based on social endowments is a time-consuming process that often demands multiple contacts and is usually a protracted affair.<sup>31</sup> As a result, previous research has concluded that recruitment based on violent coercion is a cheap alternative; it is a “path of least resistance.”<sup>32</sup> This idea can be seen in the assumption from the child soldier literature that rebel groups will choose to employ violent coercion if given the opportunity. For example, Achvarina and Reich’s

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<sup>30</sup> Vera Achvarina, “Adult Abductors and Child Conscripts: Explaining Child Soldier Recruitment by Non-State Armed Groups,” unpublished manuscript (University of Toronto, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> See Mauricio Florez-Morris, “Joining Guerrilla Groups in Colombia: Individual Motivations and Processes for Entering a Violent Organization,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 30, no. 7 (June 2007): 615–34.

<sup>32</sup> Herbst, “Economic Incentives.”

argument that the level of security in refugee camps determines the likelihood of child soldiers presupposes that given the opportunity to raid refugee camps for recruits, rebel groups will do so.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, structural arguments that focus on poverty, youth population bulges, etc. make the same assumption that rebel groups will violently coerce participation given the chance, since the use of force eliminates the cost of offering economic benefits or dedicating time to building and mobilizing social endowments.

The assumption that violent coercion is a cheap means of recruitment is flawed because it overlooks other costs involved. I argue instead that violent coercion generally provides a poor organizational base for rebellion. There are several costs inherent in violent coercion that make it prohibitively expensive for rebel groups. First, rebels who have been violently coerced into the group are less likely to be committed to the group and run a high risk for attrition. Because of this, rebel groups must police the recruits to ensure that they do not escape. Monitoring forced recruits to prevent defection is labor intensive and an inefficient use of resources since energy must be devoted to policing rather than other facets of the rebellion, such as intelligence gathering, tactical planning, and resource acquisition.

Second, despite efforts to monitor the forced recruits, they often succeed in escaping. This is particularly problematic when many take advantage of the heat of battle to make their escape. Herbst notes the frequency with which forced recruits run away as soon as shots are fired, a phenomenon that Blattman and Annan also observe in Uganda.<sup>34</sup> This attrition during battle is particularly problematic for rebel groups since it drastically reduces military effectiveness. The rebel group then has fewer men with which to fight, often leaving the remaining forces vulnerable to counterattacks.

Finally, in addition to increasing the internal costs of organizational and military effectiveness, employing forced recruitment also risks creating external costs by alienating the civilian population. Using violent measures to recruit from the civilian population often generates antagonism toward the rebel group. Civilian support can take numerous forms, such as providing lodging, supplies, and information. It can also take the form of not reporting rebel presence in the area to security forces. This informational aspect of civilian support is particularly crucial in guerrilla/irregular wars.<sup>35</sup> In areas where rebels are known to use such measures, there are strong incentives for civilians to collaborate with government forces by providing them with information on rebel troop movements in order to prevent the rebels from kidnapping locals. Clearly, the use of violent measures in rebel recruitment

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<sup>33</sup> Achvarina and Reich, "No Place to Hide."

<sup>34</sup> Herbst, "Economic Incentives"; Blattman and Annan, "LRA Abduction."

<sup>35</sup> Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

incurs costs, yet these practices are sometimes employed by rebel groups: why should groups choose such a costly strategy?

### WHY SWITCH TO FORCED RECRUITMENT?

While previous research on rebel recruitment has tended to treat a group's recruitment strategy as static, I propose that groups are likely to shift recruitment strategies depending on the exigencies of the conflict.<sup>36</sup> Rather than being path dependent, I suggest that the incentive structure for the rebel group to choose amongst different recruitment strategies will shift over the course of the conflict. The cost-benefit calculus of various recruitment strategies is weighed in relation to the other organizational needs of the group, given the situation on the ground. This dynamic aspect of recruitment is missing from the theoretical literature, though a simple reading of many conflicts supports the idea that recruitment strategies can shift over time. Blattman and Annan, for example, note that in Uganda, Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) recruits were voluntary in the late 1980s and early 1990s.<sup>37</sup> It was not until the mid-1990s that the LRA began to employ forced recruitment of mainly children.

I suggest that whether the rebel group will opt for voluntary or forced recruitment is largely dependent on the needs of the group at any given point. In general, using selective incentives—whether social or economic—is optimal since incentives ensure a more engaged and committed individual than violent coercion. Social incentives are preferable to economic incentives because they lead to greater levels of commitment, but both strategies are effective in producing the desired end: attaining recruits. Incentives are also self-enforcing and therefore superior to costly monitoring. Such voluntary recruitment strategies are thus well worth the investment since they produce committed rebels and a more acquiescent civilian population.

For this reason rebel groups should not opt for forced recruitment until their need for troops is greater than their ability to recruit these troops voluntarily; in other words, they become desperate.<sup>38</sup> What leads rebel groups

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<sup>36</sup> Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*; Humphreys and Weinstein, "Who Fights?"; Humphreys and Weinstein's study of recruitment in Sierra Leone tests a static model of recruitment, though they acknowledge that the determinants of mobilization may vary over time.

<sup>37</sup> Blattman and Annan, "LRA Abduction."

<sup>38</sup> Metelits makes a similar argument in regard to the rebel group's treatment of the civilian population broadly speaking, which she suggests is effected by the extent to which the rebel group perceives a threat to its survival. Alexander Downes also argues that desperation leads to an increased likelihood of civilian victimization in interstate and colonial wars. Achvarina posits that intense fighting should lead to a higher demand of child soldiers. Claire Metelits, "The Logic of Change: Pushing the Boundaries of Insurgent Behavior Theory," *Defense and Security Analysis* 25, no. 2 (June 2009): 105–18; Downes, *Targeting Civilians in War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Achvarina, "Adult Abductors." The situation

to adopt desperate measures? I suggest that the experience of shocks coupled with time pressure will increase the likelihood that rebel groups shift from voluntary to violent recruitment practices. While voluntary recruitment is normally the optimal choice, shocks can decrease its viability as an option. Both of these components—shocks and shortened time horizons—are vital to the theoretical story, so I address them each in turn.

On the ground, shocks come primarily in two forms: economic and military. When rebel groups lose access to external funding, they will need to direct their limited remaining economic resources to other facets of the insurgency. In such contexts, the cost of economic incentives in recruitment can be too great. External funding can come, for example, from the government of another state, an allied rebel group, or via diasporas. Such funding sources often dry up, leaving rebel groups unable to provide economic incentives. In Mozambique, often regarded as one of the most prominent cases of violent recruitment, the rebel group Renamo (Mozambiquan National Resistance) actually recruited via selective incentives at the outset of the conflict; it was with the withdrawal of Rhodesian economic and logistical support and a stepped-up effort to challenge the state in 1979 that Renamo began to employ force in recruitment.<sup>39</sup> Economic shocks can also occur when rebels lose access to a vital domestic financial source, such as the exploitation of natural resources. Economic shocks can naturally feed into military shocks; with budgetary restraints, rebels are also unable to purchase arms and other supplies necessary to their war effort. Economic shocks also tend to cause a blow to morale and can lead to increased levels of attrition. The sum result is decreased military effectiveness, with rebel groups often floundering in the direct aftermath. Some groups manage to develop new revenue channels or elaborate methods to exist on a restricted income, while for others economic shocks will ultimately lead to the decline and fall of the movement.<sup>40</sup>

Military shocks occur when the rebel group experiences increased demands to deploy troops. Such a situation is likely to occur when fighting intensifies. Often of particular import is the outcome of such fighting: the more losses the rebel group suffers in battle, the greater the pressure will be to replenish stocks quickly through coercive measures. Rebel losses also create disincentives for voluntary recruitment, as constituents shy away from joining what appears to be a losing fight. For example, Tamil rebels in Sri Lanka shifted to violent coercive recruitment when faced with escalating

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is somewhat analogous to governments that adopt conscription in times of war to compensate for a paucity of volunteers.

<sup>39</sup> Weinstein, *Inside Rebellion*.

<sup>40</sup> One might argue that the withdrawal of external economic resources makes rebel groups more dependent on civilians and therefore less likely to abuse them through violent recruitment. The problem is that groups with recruitment strategies based on material incentives will have no base of popular support upon which to fall back when resources dry up. As a result, such groups are apt to employ coercion.

violence and manpower shortages.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, when rebels are pushing toward a final victory, the military necessity of being able to field an adequate number of troops in the short term can outweigh all other considerations, including the long-term implications of forced recruitment. In these types of situations, where rebels are desperate for manpower, military imperatives should create a situation in which rebel groups find they can no longer invest the time necessary to employ voluntary measures.<sup>42</sup>

Whether these shocks incentivize coerced recruitment should be conditional on the group's time horizons, that is, whether it has a foreshortened sense of the future or not. If we envision additional recruits as a payoff for a rebel group, the question is how the group will balance the trade-off between larger payoffs (committed versus uncommitted recruits) and the costs that are involved with each path. The costs for a committed recruit are either material or manpower (during recruiting drives), while the costs for an uncommitted recruit are decreased military efficiency, decreased ability to recruit committed recruits in the future, and the long-term manpower costs involved in policing. Thus, the costs of voluntary recruitment tend to be incurred up front while the costs of forced recruitment materialize later. When time is perceived as constrained, the balance between the benefits and costs shifts in favor of accepting a lower payoff per (uncommitted) recruit because associated recruitment costs will be incurred later. For desperate groups who are working under shortened time horizons, the most salient goals will be those that can be realized in the short term and to achieve these short-term goals, groups will be more likely to estimate that this trade-off is required.<sup>43</sup>

Rebel leaders are likely to face hard supply constraints in times of crisis, a situation I alluded to earlier. Even if rebel leaders were willing to continue to incur the costs associated with voluntary recruitment, crisis environments may make it impossible to find individuals willing to join, even when offered a premium for their participation. Certainly any indication that the rebels are weakened—as usually occurs with battlefield setbacks and loss of funding—should increase the calculation of risk by potential recruits who estimate an increased probability of being captured or killed.

Unlike previous research that posits static recruitment strategies, I thus suggest that rebel recruitment strategies are dynamic and contingent on the

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<sup>41</sup> Goodwin-Gill and Cohn, *Child Soldiers*.

<sup>42</sup> Andvig and Gates make a similar argument related to the supply and demand of recruits; Andvig and Gates, "Recruiting Children."

<sup>43</sup> It may be difficult for outsiders to the group to observe when groups shorten their time horizons, which can lead to post hoc inferences. One useful indicator is the overall military and political strategy of the group. The case vignettes below will provide some examples of how the group's strategy provided a useful guidepost to its reasoning regarding time horizons. Another possibility is that the style of warfare may impact on this estimation; shifting from guerrilla to conventional warfare, for example, may result in shortened time horizons since conventional warfare is rarely fought as a war of attrition.

needs of the group. When suffering from shocks and working with shortened time horizons, strategic military imperatives necessitate the conscription of troops that cannot be obtained through normal processes of voluntary recruitment. In essence, the group trades long-term gains from voluntary recruitment for the short-term gains from forced recruitment that are necessary to survive when under extreme pressure. A wealth of cases illustrates this phenomenon. For example, rebel losses in El Salvador led to a shift in military strategy focusing on small mobile groups; the resultant demoralization led the rebels to begin forcibly recruiting teenagers.<sup>44</sup> The cases of Mozambique and Sri Lanka also provide prima facie evidence for this phenomenon. The empirical record indicates that rebel groups rarely employ violent recruitment at the outset of rebellion, precisely because leaders are aware of the costs of these methods, yet they will divert strategies toward coercion when faced with crises.

### THE VIABILITY OF COERCED RECRUITMENT

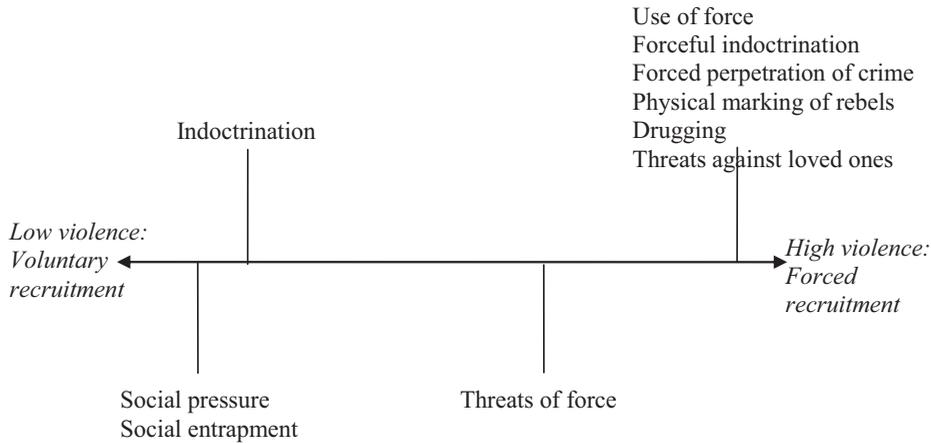
It is one thing to adopt forced recruitment out of desperation, and quite another to maintain it as a long-term strategy. How can groups minimize the costs involved with violent recruitment? When will rebel groups be able to maintain conscription, and when will they be forced to abandon it? In addressing these questions it may be useful to examine the different types of coerced recruitment.

Earlier, I defined coercive recruitment broadly as all forms of pressure that induce individuals to take actions that they otherwise would not. As such, one can place various coercive tactics on a continuum of violence, from non-violent coercion like social pressure to exceptionally violent coercion, such as the use of force against recruits or forcing recruits to become perpetrators of crimes (Figure 1). The desperation/time horizon argument about the adoption of coerced recruitment does not make predictions about what form of coerced or forced recruitment a group will undertake; it merely predicts that the group will engage in some type of involuntary recruitment.

But in considering the viability of coerced recruitment tactics, it is worth considering the extent to which they differ in their levels of violence. What I propose is that it is not the amount of violence that explains which coercive recruitment tactics are most viable in the long run, but rather a calculation based on their costs versus effectiveness. In terms of costs, I am referring specifically to the direct costs to the organization of policing the recruit.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*, 157.

<sup>45</sup> Costs here are primarily conceived of in terms of the inputs necessary to avert attrition, as well as external costs vis-à-vis the civilian population. If a group uses voluntary recruitment in time  $t$ , then the probability of retention in  $t + 1$  is greater than if it uses coerced recruitment. To increase the probability of



**FIGURE 1** Continuum of violence in coercive recruitment.

Equally important is whether the tactic facilitates compliance, that is, whether it is effective. Does the tactic allow the “recruit” an exit strategy or not? Does the tactic remove the desire for an exit strategy entirely? Figure 2 provides an overview of the cost-compliance typology of coercive recruitment.

The most ineffective tactics should be those that generate high costs for the group while engendering little compliance. Using threats provides the rebel group with little ability to consolidate its leverage over the individual recruit. Where individuals are recruited solely by use of threat, the rebel group is likely to face the types of policing and attrition problems discussed earlier. These recruits will have low levels of commitment, and unless the threat of force is continually—and credibly—applied, they will have no incentives to remain with the group. The same is largely true even when greater levels of violence are applied. In cases where the group actually employs force against recruits, be it beatings, sexual violence, or other forms of physical abuse, the group is ultimately faced with the same policing problem. While the added level of violence may convince the recruits that the group is credible in its threat to use force should they try to flee, there is little incentive for the recruits not to take the first best opportunity to escape from what is essentially a situation of slavery. Many groups recognize this and attempt to combine the use of force with less violent coercive tactics. For example, in many cases, forcibly recruited rebels are subsequently subjected

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retention in situations of coercion requires the input of manpower. These attrition-prevention (manpower) costs are weighed by the group when calculating whether or not to adopt coerced recruitment. Thus, it should be underscored that throughout this article the focus is on the recruitment strategy; the extent to which retention strategies are of interest is relative to how they relate to this initial calculation of costs. Retention is part of the equation that has impacts on recruitment strategies, both their initial adoption and their duration over time as groups update their information on their relative effectiveness and costs.

		Internal Maintenance Cost to the Rebel Group	
		Low	High
Recruit Compliance	Low		Threats of force against recruit Use of force against recruit
	High	Social pressure Social entrapment Forced perpetration of crimes Physical marking of rebels Threats of force against loved ones Drugging	Indoctrination Forceful indoctrination

**FIGURE 2** Coercive recruitment viability.

to indoctrination once they are within the movement, an approach that is often successful in convincing recruits to remain with the group.<sup>46</sup>

Tactics that have high compliance levels, on the other hand, are far more attractive. The use of indoctrination, both as a means to recruit and as a means to consolidate a group's hold on individuals after recruitment, aids in retention because it invests individuals in the belief that they have a strong desire to belong to the group. Indoctrination in and of itself is difficult to categorize as being definitively coercive; some (particularly rebel leaders) would argue that it is simply a means of providing political education, while others view it as a form of brainwashing. Certainly indoctrination goes beyond simple political education; it is used in situations that trigger emotional arousal (for example, feelings of fear generated by participating in activities led by an illegal rebel group associated with violence) and individuals often have impaired attentional capacity (due to stress, lack of sleep, etc.). Such situations have been shown to have debilitating impacts on basic social psychological and cognitive processes integral to persuasion and behavior change.<sup>47</sup> As such, there is an element of coercion involved; as the group uses systematic indoctrination, it seeks to manipulate normal cognitive processes and replace them with programs of attitude and value change.

<sup>46</sup>Jessica Schafer, "Guerrillas and Violence in the War in Mozambique: De-Socialization or Re-Socialization?" *African Affairs* 100 (2001): 215–37.

<sup>47</sup>Baron, "Arousal"; Anthony R. Pratkanis and Elliot Aronson, *Age of Propaganda* (New York: Freeman, 1992); Margaret Thaler Singer, *Cults in Our Midst* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003).

Despite its advantages, indoctrination is time-consuming and manpower-intensive and therefore costly, which is not advantageous when the group is operating under time and resource constraints. At the same time, groups often resist dismantling indoctrination programs because there are sunk costs involved. Indoctrination—like the ideology that it promotes—takes time to develop and reproduce. Generating effective systems for the reproduction of an ideology through indoctrination requires considerable start-up costs and, once entrenched, rebel groups will be reluctant to dismantle such programs. Even in cases where rebel groups find themselves without the time and capacity to implement indoctrination, they often reduce the amount of time dedicated to indoctrination rather than abandon the system entirely. For indoctrination to work properly, however, requires some fundamental minimum investment in time and resources, and so at a certain point, the marginal utility decreases and makes the entire enterprise largely worthless beyond its function as a signal that the group remains committed to its ideology.

There is some evidence from social psychology that employing forceful indoctrination (for example, after abducting an individual) produces even more lasting effects, given that it is done in a very specific manner. Robert S. Baron argues that forceful indoctrination is more effective because stress levels are higher and more salient to indoctrinees given the greater threats to their persons and freedom.<sup>48</sup> Ultimately, most forced indoctrination programs seek to induce individuals into making costly behaviors that commit it to the group (making confessions, providing information about the loyalties of others, participating in violence, recruiting others, etc.). These are performed in an attempt to reduce the threatening or aversive aspects of the situation. In doing so, however, cognitive dissonance mechanisms kick in, leading to rationalization and justification processes in which indoctrinees convince themselves that they actually believe in the aims of the group and the actions they are taking to achieve these aims.<sup>49</sup> The breaking down of individuals so that they engage in dissonance-evoking behavior is essential for forceful indoctrination to function because experimental research has shown that extreme threats otherwise allow individuals to justify their behavior in terms of the threats and thus avoid the problem of cognitive dissonance.<sup>50</sup> Either way, even if both voluntary and forced indoctrination can consolidate a group's hold over individuals, they are prohibitively costly when a group experiences shrinking resources and increased time constraints.

In contrast, coercive tactics with low maintenance costs but which result in high compliance should be most viable in the long run and are likely to

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<sup>48</sup> Baron, "Arousal."

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Leon Festinger and James M. Carlsmith, "Cognitive Consequences of Forced Compliance," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 58, no. 2 (March 1959): 203–10.

provide the group with a lasting solution to the policing costs associated with forced recruitment. Social pressure is completely nonviolent and contains only an implicit threat of violence; as such, the group is not likely to incur many of the costs associated with other forms of coercive recruitment. Social pressure may permeate a society and lead to expectations that individuals join, particularly when the individuals know that the armed rebel group shares these social expectations. To a certain extent, then, the individual may wish to resist joining, but in situations of intense social pressure, this wish will be eroded by desires for group acceptance and conformity processes.<sup>51</sup> And while I have placed it in the high compliance category, the extent to which social pressure permeates individuals' lives will affect the extent to which it can be categorized as a low compliance or high compliance tactic.

Similarly, Jannie Lilja describes the concept of social entrapment, or when individuals are progressively drawn into rebel groups, usually first through legal civilian activities which are then subsequently converted into military functions.<sup>52</sup> She describes the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam's (LTTE) practice of recruiting individuals first into the LTTE civil service, and how in doing so individuals became labeled as LTTE-affiliated, thus shrinking their range of options for fear of government retribution. Blurring civilian-combatant distinctions through the use of social ties, and in particular, doing so in an incremental fashion, allows the rebel group to effectively entrap individuals into increasing levels of participation in military activities. Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that not only will individuals not blame the group for this situation, but that they will seek to reduce the dissonance by convincing themselves that in fact joining the group is the correct action to take anyway.<sup>53</sup> The ability of groups to employ social pressure and social entrapment is greatly facilitated when they control a territory and therefore exert a monopoly on the use of force.

Such nonviolent practices are not always viable options and the remaining low cost-high compliance options available to groups are violent in nature. They can, for example, force recruits to perpetrate crimes, and in particular crimes against their kin or community, which violate social norms to such an extent that the action effectively eliminates the possibility of individuals returning home. With no home to return to, conscripts are left with few exit options. In Mozambique, for example, Renamo forced new recruits to kill family members to make return to their communities more difficult.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Baron, "Arousal."

<sup>52</sup> Jannie Lilja, "Trapping Constituents or Winning Hearts and Minds? Rebel Strategies to Attain Constituent Support in Sri Lanka," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 21, no. 2 (March 2009): 306–26. See also Lucian Pye for examples from the Communist insurgency in Malaya; Pye, *Guerrilla Communism in Malaya: Its Social and Political Meaning* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1956).

<sup>53</sup> Leon Festinger, *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (Evanston, IL: Row Peterson, 1957).

<sup>54</sup> Lisa Hultman, "The Power to Hurt in Civil War: The Strategic Aim of RENAMO Violence," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 35, no. 4 (December 2009): 821–34.

Similarly, physically marking the conscripts as rebels, for example by branding or amputating body parts, is another way that rebel groups can constrain the ability of conscripts to escape. If conscripts leave the (relative) safety of the group, they can easily be identified as rebels by the security forces and civilian population, and face retribution.

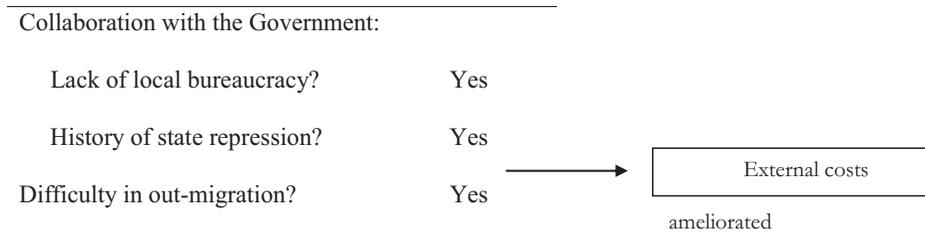
While threats against recruits do not lead to high compliance because individuals may be willing to risk their own safety to escape, rebel threats to harm one's family are far more likely to lead to compliance because individual recruits on the lam have little ability to protect their loved ones. Human Rights Watch reports that the LRA killed the family of one escapee when they were unable to find him, while groups like Renamo made explicit threats to kill family members at the outset to prevent attrition, and indeed followed up on its threats.<sup>55</sup> Such extreme uses of violent coercion remove the need for the rebel group to police the conscripts to prevent attrition since the group has effectively shut off exit options, given that individuals believe a group's threats to be credible.

Drugs can provide a shortcut to altering recruits' mental states and generate acquiescence to the group, as well as facilitate the use of violence. Rebel groups like the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) in Liberia have notoriously employed mind-altering drugs like crack cocaine to their abducted recruits as a means to exert control.<sup>56</sup> Given that a group has access to such drugs, they are considerably less costly than policing to prevent attrition. But the group is then dependent on the drug supply, particularly as rebels grow increasingly addicted, and supply shortages can cause major crises. Moreover, groups must weigh the effectiveness of the drugs in preventing attrition versus their effects on individuals as fighters, and as members of the group more generally. Because drugs can lead to erratic and unpredictable behavior, it is a risky prospect to provide arms to someone under their influence. Such erratic behavior can also be harmful to group cohesion and social dynamics. Given supply-side problems and the risk of unpredictable behavior, it is not surprising then that relatively few groups have opted to use drugs as a means to control forced recruits, despite the low maintenance costs and high compliance provided.

So far I have only considered the internal maintenance costs of coerced recruitment in terms of the policing costs incurred by the rebel group. But there are also costs to coerced recruitment that are external to the group, namely, costs associated with alienating the civilian population. Should civilians become worried that they or their loved ones will be forcibly recruited, they will have incentives to provide information to the government regarding rebel troop movements and membership. Denunciation itself carries high

<sup>55</sup> "Abducted and Abused," Human Rights Watch; Hultman, "Power to Hurt."

<sup>56</sup> Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone* (London: International African Institute, 2004).



**FIGURE 3** Ameliorating external costs.

risks, however, as rebels often expend a considerable effort exacting revenge on those who are perceived as betraying them to the government, so civilians will only do so under conditions in which they believe there is a low probability for being punished.

When rebel groups maintain absolute control over a territory, they are particularly well-positioned to exploit nonviolent tactics, especially when civilians have few options in terms of migration.<sup>57</sup> This does not necessarily mean, however, that they will renounce violent tactics. In LTTE-controlled areas, for example, civilians were subjected to not only social pressure and social entrapment, but also more explicit forms of coercion. But by virtue of the fact that Sri Lanka is an island and the rebels maintained strong control throughout their territory, civilians had few options and posed little threat in terms of denunciation.

External costs can be ameliorated even if the group's territorial control is contested (Figure 3). For denunciation to be a viable security-management strategy for civilians, a number of conditions must be met. The first concerns the opportunity to collaborate with the government. Civilians have to be able to easily convey information to government representatives. They should not need to travel long distances (which not only disrupts their economic life, but also draws attention to their departure from normal routines); and they should be able to quickly communicate time-sensitive information, like the arrival of rebel troops. These conditions require the presence of either a local government bureaucracy or the widespread reach of security forces, things that are likely to be in short supply in many conflict countries characterized by weak state apparatuses with limited reach. Indeed, rebels' choice of areas of operation is often based precisely on where the state is the weakest. It should be noted however that weak state control is not equivalent to rebel control; many areas are contested or subject to little or weak control

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<sup>57</sup> Absolute rebel control in this sense is best understood as Kalyvas' Zone 5, which specifies permanent insurgent presence and unhindered operation in a locale, with no incumbent activity, as well as the proviso that the rebel group should have the ability to control population movements; Kalyvas, *Logic of Violence*.

by either warring party. Thus, this criterion is not equivalent to the rebel territorial control scenario discussed above.

In addition to having the opportunity to provide information to the government, civilians must also have a modicum of trust in the government institution they contact. Will the government act on the information, and will it reveal the source of the information? In some cases, government officials or army troops may be unwilling or unable to meet with civilians; in ethnic insurgencies on the periphery, they may not even be able to speak the local language. Much has been written in the literature on counterinsurgency on how to win hearts and minds, not least of which is the importance of local-level reach and local sensitivities.<sup>58</sup> If the government itself has a reputation for violent repression, it is less likely that individuals will consider approaching government officials to be a viable option. Thus, one can expect that violent recruitment practices will alienate civilian populations and potentially lead to costs for the rebel group, but this is contingent on the group's reliance on the civilian population and the ability of the government to provide an outlet for civilian security concerns.

Finally, another alternative available to the civilian population is to instead migrate to other areas, be it inside or outside the country. In El Salvador, for example, the FMLN rebels were forced to retract their policy of forced recruitment when faced with civilian opposition and the flight of many families away from rebel-controlled areas.<sup>59</sup> In this case, the civilian costs proved too great to bear, despite the difficulties rebels had otherwise in recruitment. Depending on the context, out-migration may be difficult. For example, economic factors like extreme impoverishment may inhibit mobility, or geographic terrain may be prohibitively dangerous (when rebel territory is abutted by harsh environments like deserts or mountain ranges, or in island settings, for example). The extent to which civilian mobility is a viable alternative impacts on the extent to which rebel groups can coerce civilian populations with impunity.

This section examined the full spectrum of coercive violence in order to explore why forced recruitment is sometimes viable and sometimes abandoned. The proposition is that recruitment tactics that provide a high level of compliance but at low cost are optimal in respect to the problem of internal policing, given that the group has restricted resources to allocate to recruitment. When groups employ violent tactics, they must address the problem of civilian hostility and the risk of denunciation. Whether these external costs can be ameliorated may depend on whether civilians have the outside options of fleeing or collaborating with the government. Violent high-compliance, low-cost tactics are thus viable insofar as the group

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<sup>58</sup> Richard Stubbs, *Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare: The Malayan Emergency 1948–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>59</sup> Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action*.

can restrict civilian movements and the government lacks reach, be it due to lack of representation or trust.<sup>60</sup> When the government maintains a local presence that can be trusted by civilians, or when the civilians can flee rebel areas en masse, we should expect that violent tactics are more likely to be abandoned.

In connecting the discussion about the initial adoption of coerced recruitment with its continued use, it is worth noting that the initial conditions that led to the decision to adopt coerced recruitment need not remain for the use of coerced recruitment to continue. Having made the leap to coerced recruitment and offended the civilian population in the process, some groups may deem it better to find a way to ameliorate the costs of coercion rather than to try to voluntarily recruit a populace that has grown hostile in the interim. Certainly if the original conditions are in place—the group is desperate for troops and needs them quickly—then it is more likely that the group retain coercion, but a return to “normality” may not necessarily entail a return to earlier recruitment modes.

## EMPIRICAL ILLUSTRATIONS

The following sections provide three vignettes that describe different patterns of rebel recruitment. These are chosen both to illustrate the logic of the arguments presented here, but also to probe the scope conditions. The first case, of the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M) in Nepal, illustrates the argument presented here: the group employed voluntary recruitment supplemented by extensive indoctrination programs at the outset of the conflict, but as military imperatives shifted, it reverted to somewhat more coercive measures in its recruitment strategies.

In the second case—the Tigrean People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) in Ethiopia—the rebel group never resorted to forced recruitment despite the extended length of the conflict. In addressing why it did not do so, I speculate that this can in large part be explained by the fact that despite several major setbacks, the TPLF never faced shortened time horizons that would demand rapid troop expansion. This case thus highlights the importance of time pressure; how rebel groups react to battlefield outcomes is contingent on their overall political-military strategy.

The third case, the RUF in Sierra Leone, challenges some of the ideas presented here. In virtually all other cases of violent forced

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<sup>60</sup> Thus, in terms of governmental control, the applicable criteria are not only the presence of governmental representatives, as is traditionally understood by the term “zones of control,” but also citizens’ trust in these institutions to provide security guarantees.

recruitment—Uganda, Mozambique, Liberia, etc.—the empirical pattern follows the theoretical argument: first voluntary recruitment, then forced recruitment as rebels grow desperate. In Sierra Leone, however, the group employed forced recruitment at the outset of the conflict (in addition to some voluntary recruitment). I suggest that because the RUF was created and controlled by the National Patriotic Forces of Liberia (NPFL) to fight a proxy war, it had little interest in creating a viable political movement or in generating support from the civilian population in Sierra Leone. Even after the departure of the Liberians from the group, a strong reputation effect had already set in which made continued forced recruitment the only viable option.

It should be emphasized that the aim of these narratives is not to draw causal claims but rather to illustrate and probe the ideas presented here through the use of deviant and non-cases in order to establish some scope conditions regarding the population of cases to which the theoretical approach is plausibly applicable.

#### The CPN-M in Nepal (1996–2006): From Indoctrination to Abduction

The CPN-M explicitly adopted and adapted Mao Zedong's theory of protracted warfare, which describes three phases: the strategic defensive, the strategic balance, and the strategic offensive.<sup>61</sup> At the outset, the group laid plans for a protracted war and found quick success in recruiting people from rural areas where poverty and exploitation were rife, exploiting grievances held by large parts of the rural population.<sup>62</sup> The recruitment strategy focused on voluntary membership consolidated through the use of intensive indoctrination.<sup>63</sup> The group's ideology was presented in mass meetings—attendance at which was largely mandatory for local villagers—which promoted the group's ideological propaganda.<sup>64</sup> Upon membership, an individual could be trained for as long as several years in the ideology of the party while working in the political wing before being allowed into the military wing.<sup>65</sup>

The government's weak control outside of Kathmandu allowed the Maoists to quickly capture vast swathes of land relatively unchallenged. By November 2001, the Maoists felt confident enough to declare a move into the

<sup>61</sup> Each of these phases was deliberately announced by the CPN-M leadership as they were implemented by the group.

<sup>62</sup> Deepak Thapa, "Days of the Maoist," *Himal* 14, no. 5 (2001): 4–21.

<sup>63</sup> Jo Becker, "Child Recruitment in Burma, Sri Lanka, and Nepal," in *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States*, ed. Scott Gates and Simon Reich (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

<sup>64</sup> Kristine Eck, "Recruiting Rebels: Indoctrination and Political Education in Nepal," in *The Maoist Insurgency in Nepal: Revolution in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* ed. Mahendra Lawoti and Anup Pahari (London: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>65</sup> Krishna Bahadur Mahara (CPN-M Central Committee Member), interview by Kristine Eck, Kathmandu, 19 March 2007.

strategic balance and to directly confront the army; until that point, only the police had been involved in counterinsurgency efforts. Maoist tactics proved surprisingly effective, and large parts of the countryside fell under Maoist sway. As the fighting escalated, the Maoists lost many troops that needed to be replenished quickly if the movement was to survive. No longer able to devote extensive resources to the type of in-depth recruitment and training processes they once employed, abductions became increasingly commonplace in this period. Kidnapped either alone or in large groups, individuals were taken from homes or schools into the countryside where they were held for several days, introduced to Maoist ideology, and urged to join the Maoist movement. Most of those abducted were subsequently released, and as such they were not generally forced into service at gunpoint. These abductions, however, served as a powerful coercive force in rebel recruitment. Furthermore, the abductions served as a means to identify attractive recruits, who were targeted after release for further recruitment efforts.

There were both more abductions and more Maoist fatalities in 2002 alone than in the entire 1996–2001 period.<sup>66</sup> It became increasingly clear that the much-feared army would not be able to definitively crush the Maoist forces as expected; at the same time, it was also clear that the Maoists had little chance of outright military victory, particularly given that the government had powerful international backers.<sup>67</sup> After renouncing a ceasefire that lasted for much of 2003 the Maoists returned to combat, and by August 2004 they announced the start of Mao's third and final stage of strategic offensive. With this shift in strategy came an increase in the use of conventional tactics, or what Maoist leaders called "semi-positional warfare," which entailed mobilizing upward of two thousand to five thousand troops in a single attack on a major security installation.<sup>68</sup> The renewed heavy scale of fighting combined with the change in military tactics associated with the strategic offensive ratcheted up the pressure on the Maoists to make inroads militarily.

Virtually all resources were redirected toward the military effort, and the strategic offensive phase demanded such a large number of troops that the Maoists increasingly resorted to coercion.<sup>69</sup> During this period, abductions became extremely common, and the number of abductees increased more than twenty-fold.<sup>70</sup> Table I shows the distribution of fatalities committed by the state security forces over the duration of the conflict and illustrates the

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<sup>66</sup> "Data on Killings," Nepal-Informal Sector Service Centre (INSEC), <http://www.inseconline.org/>, accessed 20 November 2008.

<sup>67</sup> India, the United States, and the United Kingdom all provided military and economic support to the government in its fight against the Maoist rebels from 2002 on; UCDP, *Conflict Encyclopedia*.

<sup>68</sup> Dev Gurung (CPN-M Central Committee Member), interview by Kristine Eck, CPN-M Headquarters, Kathmandu, Nepal, 2007.

<sup>69</sup> Kristine Eck, "Chasing Causation: Unpacking the Poverty-Conflict Correlation in Nepal," unpublished manuscript (Uppsala University, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> "Data on Killings," INSEC.

**TABLE 1** Individuals Killed by Nepal State Security Forces

	All Victims	Verified Maoists
1996	59	0
1997	16	0
1998	334	5
1999	328	0
2000	180	0
2001	243	34
2002	3,266	1,819
2003	1,217	864
2004	1,606	1,177
2005	815	637

increase in fatalities wrought by the declaration of strategic balance and the provocation of the army, the brief decline during the 2003 ceasefire, and the subsequent rise in 2004 with the move to strategic offensive.<sup>71</sup> What the numbers mask is that the public announcement of strategic offensive committed the rebels to demonstrate progress toward an eventual victory.<sup>72</sup> While Maoist leaders deny using coercion in recruitment, they do admit to an increased desire to demonstrate strength with the move to strategic offensive.<sup>73</sup> Author interviews with demobilized foot soldiers also confirm that those who joined later (particularly 2004 and later) received far less training, if any at all, before being deployed for military operations.<sup>74</sup>

Indoctrination was optimal for the rebels for many years at the outset of the conflict when they had the manpower available to devote to it, and when the movement employed guerrilla military tactics that required highly committed and loyal rebels.<sup>75</sup> As the CPN-M switched to semi-positional warfare and the conflict escalated, the group neither had the manpower available for indoctrination nor the inclination to spend years educating an individual who would only be used as cannon fodder in mass attacks on army forts.<sup>76</sup> In relying more heavily on abductions, the CPN-M thus introduced a much stronger element of force in its recruitment tactics, but it nonetheless attempted to hold fast to Maoist ideology regarding the importance of civilian

<sup>71</sup> The data come from the respected Nepali NGO INSEC.

<sup>72</sup> One might ask why the Maoists would transition into such a phase, given the military pressures it placed on the organization. Maoist propaganda suggests that the decision was taken due to the momentum the group had achieved in terms of controlling the countryside as well as a desire to attain victory before external states like India or the United States might intervene militarily, see Revolutionary Worker, "Nepal Maoists Open Strategic Offensive in People's War," no. 1254, [http://www.revcom.us/a/1254/nepal\\_people's\\_war\\_strategic\\_offensive.htm](http://www.revcom.us/a/1254/nepal_people's_war_strategic_offensive.htm), 10 October 2004. These calculations heightened the urgency the group experienced and further increased the pressure to step up offensive military operations.

<sup>73</sup> Mahara, interview by Eck.

<sup>74</sup> These interviews took place in April and May 2008, primarily in Dahaban main cantonment for CPN-M Division 5, and the Unga satellite cantonment.

<sup>75</sup> Mahara, interview by Eck.

<sup>76</sup> Eck, "Chasing Causation."

support by releasing abductees and using only the threat of force to solicit support.

Because the Maoists had evicted all local bureaucrats and police, and the army was deemed unapproachable due to its reputation for human rights violations, civilians seeking to avoid recruitment had little recourse besides fleeing. While vast numbers of young men did so, particularly to urban areas and India, this was conditional on having sufficient resources, which meant that most impoverished individuals were geographically immobile and at the mercy of Maoist pressure. Despite their limited resources, the Maoists did not abandon indoctrination entirely: instead, it was slashed from months or years to a little more than a week.<sup>77</sup> Maoist ideology emphasizes the importance of the political always superseding the military, and it is likely that the rebels were unwilling to abandon the system entirely for fear of being perceived as backing an entrenched ideological position and thus engendering reputation costs and risking internal fractionalization. The CPN-M retained the strategic use of abductions and some (but reduced) indoctrination until the end of the conflict in 2006. Throughout this period, it was conducting semi-positional warfare and was eager to press either for a military victory or concessions (which it ultimately received). The abductions certainly engendered costs among the civilians who were subject to them, but the lack of government bureaucracy at the local level and a history of government repression left civilians with little recourse for denunciation. Out-migration, practiced widely, was the only recourse to avoid abduction, but not all individuals had the resources necessary to do so. Moreover, migration was primarily a male phenomenon; women emigrating risked being forced into prostitution and were considered more vulnerable to exploitation. Because the CPN-M also recruited women, a considerable portion of the population remained in Nepal and subject to the possibility of CPN-M coercion.

### TPLF in Ethiopia (1975-1991): A Non-case

Like the CPN-M, the TPLF had its roots in Marxist-Leninist ideology. Unlike the CPN-M, however, there are no indications that the TPLF ever engaged in forced recruitment of any sort.<sup>78</sup> Why was this the case? Did the TPLF not face the sort of military and economic shocks that cause rebel groups

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> History, as they say, is written by the victors, and so it is reasonable to question whether the TPLF leaders have suppressed evidence of forced conscription in their intervening years at the helm of government. John Young states that not only do TPLF leaders deny such behavior but that he has found no evidence with which to suspect otherwise. Based in Sudan as a journalist during the war, Young frequently traveled to Tigray and had access to refugees in southern Sudan. It is likely, then, that had the TPLF used force in recruitment, Young would have unearthed indications of it. Young, *Peasant Revolution in Ethiopia: The Tigray People's Liberation Front, 1975-1991* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 127.

to become desperate? In fact, the TPLF faced two moments of crisis on their road to eventual victory. The first came in the early years of 1977–78 as it faced opposition from another rebel group for dominance in Tigray, Ethiopia; the second came at the height of the 1984–85 famine, when its close ally the Eritrea People's Liberation Front (EPLF) cut all ties. What I will suggest, however, is that the TPLF's military strategy was such that neither of these events, though crises in their own right, led the TPLF to shorten its time horizons.

With the coming of the Derg military government to power in 1974, opposition coalesced throughout the country into numerous ideologically and ethnically bound groups. In Tigray, the TPLF faced competition from two other groups: the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU) in the west of the province and the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) in the east. Despite initial setbacks, by 1978, the TPLF had succeeded in militarily defeating the EDU thanks to a combination of factors. The EDU was weakened by the fact that it was led by the nobility and thus drew supporters who were loyal to the leader and not the cause, resulting in poor motivation and a lack of discipline.<sup>79</sup> The TPLF, on the other hand, expended enormous effort in gaining the confidence and support of the peasants through its disciplined behavior, displays of self-sacrifice, and commitment to peasant interests. In this "social work" phase of mobilization, it provided physical support to peasants (that is, helping with ploughing) and took time to explain its agenda and actions to the populace.<sup>80</sup> Civilian support, combined with committed fighters and military analysis helped the group to prevail against the EDU. This approach paid dividends in the east of Tigray as well. Feeling that it was best to have only one group active in Tigray, the civilian population of the area put the issue to vote in 1978 and chose the TPLF. In doing so, the EPRP's support network collapsed; desperate to regain control, it attacked the TPLF at the same time the TPLF was in the final stages in its battle against the EDU. Very quickly the TPLF defeated the EDU and was able to redirect its forces to the east where it roundly defeated the EPRP, despite the latter's numerical superiority. The period of late 1977-early 1978 can certainly be characterized as a time of crisis for the group as it struggled for its very existence. At the same time, it is logical that the use of forced recruitment to overcome its need for manpower would never be raised as an option. The TPLF was actively battling competing non-state groups for civilian support; violence against the civilian population would have ensured civilian defection to one of the other groups. The TPLF's military strategy of protracted warfare based on civilian support helped to ensure that the group did not suffer from shortened time horizons upon the first moment of crisis.

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

The second major setback occurred in 1984–85, at the height of the famine that racked Ethiopia and in particular the northern areas of Tigray and Eritrea. The famine itself created a shock as it deprived the group of its main source of strength: the peasant population, which was either dying or had fled to camps in southern Sudan. At the same time, cracks in the TPLF's relationship to its main ally the EPLF widened.<sup>81</sup> The more professional EPLF had long provided the TPLF with military training and other forms of assistance. The two groups often collaborated in attacks and the EPLF's assistance from 1978 to 1985 was considered crucial to the survival of the TPLF. In concrete terms, the withdrawal of EPLF resulted in a decrease in troops available to the TPLF, the closure of the TPLF radio station based in Eritrea, and most critically, the closure of the TPLF's main supply link to southern Sudan. Having planned for this eventuality, however, the TPLF quickly mobilized one hundred thousand peasants to construct a new road link, which it had previously surveyed.<sup>82</sup> The group's ability to stage such an undertaking so quickly again illustrated the value of maintaining good relations with the civilian population. And while the withdrawal of EPLF troops from joint operations was certainly a blow in terms of manpower, it was also somewhat of a blessing in disguise. TPLF troops had been perishing in EPLF-led attacks that employed conventional warfare. The TPLF believed that the EPLF had switched from guerrilla to conventional warfare too early and that the high levels of military and civilian losses were not outweighed by the importance of holding fixed positions. As a result of this switch to conventional warfare, the EPLF had begun to forcibly recruit peasant youth to fill its ranks, an outcome the TPLF argued to be counterproductive. The groups eventually overcame their differences in 1988 and marched to victory together in 1991.

In neither of the major crises the TPLF faced did the group face shortened time horizons. This is in large part due to its overarching strategy based in the Maoist theory of employing guerrilla warfare until the time is ripe and anchoring its actions in the support of the civilian population. Time and again the group witnessed how violence against the civilian population led to military problems for other groups. Its dedication to the local peasantry won it such widespread support that forcible recruitment never became necessary, even when suffering perhaps the shock of famine and the destruction of an alliance. Unlike the EPLF, the TPLF refused to engage in positional warfare until absolutely assured of its ability to succeed, and thus did not come under the same sort of time-pressure induced desperation that led the EPLF to adopt forced conscription. While its Communist ideology obviously played an important role in informing the strategic position to disavow coercion, the case of Nepal highlights that even within the subset of Communist rebellions

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<sup>81</sup> The EPLF was fighting for an independent state of Eritrea.

<sup>82</sup> Young, *Peasant Revolution*.

there is great variation in the extent to which groups are willing to diverge from ideological precepts to counterbalance military necessities.<sup>83</sup>

### RUF in Sierra Leone (1991–2000): A Deviant Case

The RUF is generally understood as arising as an outgrowth of the war in Liberia between the government and NPFL that began in 1989. Led by Charles Taylor, the NPFL assisted Foday Sankoh in launching the RUF's war on the government of Sierra Leone. All evidence indicates that Taylor's interests were entirely strategic and had nothing to do with ideology or a concern for political problems in Sierra Leone.<sup>84</sup> In March 1991, approximately one hundred fighters invaded southeastern Sierra Leone from Liberia. By all accounts, these forces consisted primarily of Liberians associated with NPFL (indeed, they were reported to be some of the toughest troops), Burkinabe mercenaries, and Sierra Leoneans based in Liberia who are alternately described as political exiles or criminals.<sup>85</sup>

The use of violence by the RUF to recruit individuals into the group has been well established. One survey reports that 88 percent of the fighters in RUF described themselves as being abducted.<sup>86</sup> Because the RUF was eventually defeated and is associated with widespread violence against civilians, it is likely that many claim to be abductees due to a social desirability bias or for fear of retribution. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the abduction of youths into the RUF was a recurrent and widespread practice. The early years of the conflict are not well documented, and as a result it is difficult to pinpoint when forced recruitment began, but by all appearances the RUF employed a parallel strategy of voluntary and forced recruitment from the outset.<sup>87</sup> Charles Taylor reportedly advised Sankoh to compulsorily recruit people, and this advice went unquestioned.<sup>88</sup> High-ranking RUF officials report that in 1991 the Liberians were in charge, and orders came from Taylor

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<sup>83</sup> These examples highlight that we should not expect all Communist groups to behave identically. They diverge on critical issues of interpretation of Maoist (and other) texts, as well as in the contexts in which they operate. As such, the role of the civilian population, the strategic determinations of military operations, and the pacing of the war effort will take on different characteristics depending on the nature of the group's belief system and milieu.

<sup>84</sup> David Keen, *Conflict and Collusion in Sierra Leone* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 37–38.

<sup>85</sup> See Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimensions of an African Civil War* (London: Hurst, 1999). For political exiles, see Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*. For criminals, see Ibrahim Abdullah, "Bush Path to Destruction: The Origin and Character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)," in *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, ed. Ibrahim Abdullah (Dakar: CODESRIA, 2004).

<sup>86</sup> Humphreys and Weinstein, "Who Fights?"

<sup>87</sup> In part, the divergence in recruitment strategies may be attributed to differences in leadership. Two of the early top-ranking commanders reportedly sought to explain the movement to civilians and attain their support, disallowing violations against the local population. These leaders were executed by Sankoh in the fall of 1992; see Abdullah, "Bush Path," 61.

<sup>88</sup> Humphreys and Weinstein, "Who Fights?"

and the NPFL.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, the RUF was able to tap into deep-seated hatred for the regime to win some willing recruits; indeed, even those analysts most skeptical of the RUF admit that “quite a few” may have initially joined the RUF because of its antigovernment rhetoric.<sup>90</sup> Interviews with individuals recruited in the early years of 1991–93 suggest that ideology had greater importance than for recruits who joined after this period.<sup>91</sup> The RUF attracted a significant number of willing recruits among discontented youths, particularly urban marginals, socially disconnected village youth, and people living beyond the reach of the state in the illicit diamond fields.<sup>92</sup> Amongst these groups, the RUF was able to elicit voluntary adhesion. While the conflict in Sierra Leone is often associated with “conflict diamonds,” there is little indication that diamonds themselves posed an incentive to motivate membership.<sup>93</sup> But there are reports of other selective incentives offered, if not to lure members then to retain them: young captives recounted arriving at RUF forest camps to find clothes, shoes, medication, etc. free for the asking.<sup>94</sup>

At the same time, the RUF engaged in forcible youth conscription, notable for its brutality. Abducted individuals—usually children or young adults—had “RUF” carved into their skin to deter them from returning home for fear of reprisals. Playing into the hands of the rebels, the army summarily executed deserters, thus consolidating RUF membership.<sup>95</sup> Conscripts were also forced to commit atrocities against local leaders or their families to deter them from returning home.<sup>96</sup> The trauma of abduction, participation in atrocities, and the use of fear-inhibiting drugs like marijuana, gunpowder, angel

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<sup>89</sup> Moigboi Moigande Kosia (Ret. Capt.) “Statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” Freetown, Sierra Leone, 17 April 2003. Keen and others report that the Liberians and Burkinabe were withdrawn in early 1992. Kosia states that the command structure of RUF was in the hands of the NPFL from 1991–93. See Kosia, “Statement,” 72; Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*.

<sup>90</sup> Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 66.

<sup>91</sup> Anders Themnér, unpublished interview transcripts from Sierra Leone (Uppsala University, 2006). There is considerable debate as to the extent that the group was ideologically motivated. It did present a manifesto in 1991 entitled “The Basic Document of the RUF of Sierra Leone: The Second Liberation of Africa,” and both leaders and rank-and-file expressed the goals of overthrowing various governments and tackling corruption and injustice. See Abdullah, “Bush Path.” But Sankoh lacked education and the radical intellectual elements and student supporters who had been attracted to the group were extinguished in the first year. See Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*. Virtually all of the few remaining intellectuals were later purged in 1996. While Richards argues for the ideological credentials of the group, Abdullah counters that the RUF “does not share any of the essential characteristics of ideology, organization and discipline which mark revolutionary movements in Africa or elsewhere, except for the use of force to attain power”; Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*; Abdullah, “Bush Path,” 58.

<sup>92</sup> Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*; Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*.

<sup>93</sup> Keen argues that in fact, it was the depletion of diamond stocks that intensified frustrations of the marginalized young men involved in diamond production; Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*.

<sup>94</sup> Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Gberie, *Dirty War*; Keen, *Conflict and Collusion*; Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*.

dust, and crack cocaine all combined to disorient and confuse abductees in order to maintain control.<sup>97</sup>

There are few reports of voluntary participation after the initial years of conflict. In 1993, the group was nearly defeated and driven into the forest. A twist of fate, however, served to save the RUF: after a 1994 coup, army soldiers became increasingly dissatisfied with their positions and began to collaborate with the rebels. These “sobels”—soldiers by day, rebels by night—provided looted weapons to the RUF and undertook military actions on the rebels’ behalf. There are no indications that the rebels’ weakened position in 1993 was what led it to largely abandon all efforts to recruit individuals voluntarily. Rather, it appears that the rebels became entrenched in a web of their own making. By forcibly abducting individuals and becoming associated with excessive brutality against civilians, the rebels lost all credibility with the population and therefore had no chance of employing voluntary recruitment.

The fact that RUF employed brutal violence in recruitment has been widely noted and compared to other conflicts; Humphreys and Weinstein note, for example, that “the frequency of abduction observed in Sierra Leone has also been a common feature of contemporary conflicts, witnessed in Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Sudan, Angola, and Northern Uganda, among other places.”<sup>98</sup> What has been missed, however, is the temporal dimension to this tactic. Humphreys and Weinstein are correct that in all of the other conflicts they list, brutal recruitment tactics were used, but Liberia, Sudan, Angola, and Northern Uganda all saw voluntary recruitment at the outset; only after the rebels became desperate did they adopt forced recruitment. Why was this not the case in Sierra Leone as well? The answer, I speculate, lies in the roots of the organization as a proxy for Charles Taylor in Sierra Leone. The NPFL had little interest or need to establish RUF as a political movement with long-term viability; it needed only to fulfill short-term strategic goals. Nor was there any need to consider the civilian population, which was seen only as a source of loot. By the time it established the RUF, the NPFL had itself already adopted forced recruitment, and these practices were naturally exported by the hard-core fighters that were the foundation of the original RUF. By the time the Liberians decamped, the die had been cast: with the civilian population horrified by RUF atrocities, there was little reason to expend much effort on voluntary recruitment. One leader confirms that in 1992, forcible recruitment became firmly entrenched as the only means of garnering recruits as the group sustained itself through internal predation.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*, 29.

<sup>98</sup> Humphreys and Weinstein, “Who Fights?” 439.

<sup>99</sup> Kosia, “Statement.”

The RUF attempted to make its strategy of forcible recruitment viable by reducing its policing costs through the branding and drugging of conscripts.<sup>100</sup> Because the army was also associated with widespread human rights abuses and implicated in the sobel phenomenon, the civilian population could not leverage the threat of defection to the government as a means to hinder forced recruitment. As such, the RUF avoided paying external costs related to civilian loyalty. After years of being victimized by the RUF's brutal recruitment tactics and other attacks on the civilian population, however, the populace began to arm themselves as grassroots civil defense forces (CDF), called Kamajors. With their superior knowledge of the terrain, the Kamajors were able to successfully ambush RUF units. This began as early as 1992, but the CDF grew in 1996, when it began to receive government training and arms.<sup>101</sup> The CDF proved effective in routing the RUF and played a major role in the RUF's eventual military defeat. The case of RUF illustrates aptly that violent recruitment practices can be maintained given that the group takes measures to consolidate their control over conscripts and given that the civilian population poses no informational threat, for example, they cannot defect to the state. But the RUF case also suggests that the argument should be nuanced: in contexts in which civilians are subjected to extreme violence by the rebel group, they may innovate solutions to the problem of state absenteeism, for example, through the creation of their own security force to ensure protection. This suggests that there may be a threshold to the duration and extremity of violence beyond which the civilian population may be provoked into action and thus ultimately generating heavy costs to the rebel group.

## DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The aim of this article was to explore why rebel groups adopt and continue to use coercive recruitment strategies. In doing so, the article sought to fill a theoretical gap in our understanding of rebel recruitment strategies. I argued that rebel recruitment is a dynamic process and that groups will choose between various recruitment strategies depending on their military and organizational needs at the time. Because coercion is costly in terms of military and organizational efficiency, as well as vis-à-vis the civilian population, rebels will normally prefer to use various forms of selective incentives.

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<sup>100</sup> Additionally, Susan Shepler analogizes forced recruitment to traditional practices of fosterage and initiation into secret societies. She suggests that abduction of youth could be seen as an extension of fostering and that this may create relational bonds between a rebel commander and an abducted youth. She presents no evidence, however, to demonstrate that abducted children indeed established such bonds. Susan Shepler, "The Social and Cultural Context of Child Soldiering in Sierra Leone," paper presented at the PRIO Workshop on the Techniques of Violence, Oslo, 20–21 August 2004.

<sup>101</sup> UCDP, *Conflict Encyclopedia*.

I postulated that groups are likely to shift recruitment strategies depending on whether it is militarily expedient and discussed a number of military and economic shocks that put rebel groups in a tailspin, desperate to regroup through any means possible. I also suggested that time is an important component: violent recruitment is only adopted when the situation on the ground leaves rebels desperate to get troops and get them fast.

It is important to underscore that this article is largely a theory-building exercise and that empirical generalizations on the basis of the vignettes provided here would be inappropriate. The aim is not to make causal claims but to highlight the issue of coercion in recruitment and begin mapping a theoretical approach to the topic. Extensive empirical work is needed in several regards. First, a more systematic testing of the hypotheses is warranted, one that also takes into account the possibility of alternative explanations. Coerced recruitment may reflect other constraints, such as the demographics of the target population (for example, if the rebel group's constituency is a small ethnic minority, there will be few individuals to choose recruits from) or the ideational innovation and coherence of the group's message. Similarly, Magali Chelphi-den Hamer notes that some coerced recruits stay not because of continuing pressure but simply for a lack of better alternatives.<sup>102</sup> Second, on an empirical level, a main difficulty lies in determining criteria by which one can observe rebel group desperation *ex post*. I have harnessed data on battle losses and group strategic documents to this end, but the challenge certainly remains acute for contemporary observers to know when a group is becoming desperate.

The empirical record indicates that forced recruitment strategies are sometimes abandoned, which led to the natural follow-up question of why forced recruitment is only sometimes viable in the long run. To address this question, I took a step back to look at the entire spectrum of coercion in recruitment, from nonviolent measures (like social entrapment) to extremely violent tactics (like branding recruits). I posited that recruitment tactics that provide a high level of compliance at low cost are optimal in respect to the problem of internal policing. When these tactics are violent, however, they may result in external costs *vis-à-vis* the civilian population. I suggested that violent high-compliance low-cost tactics would only be viable if defection to the government can be constrained and the group can restrict civilian out-migration.

Three case narratives were provided to both highlight and challenge the arguments put forth in this article, in order to de-limit the scope conditions. The Sierra Leone case suggested a constriction of the population of cases to which the arguments are valid; proxy wars in which a rebel group

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<sup>102</sup> Magali Chelphi den-Hamer, "Militarized Youth in Western Côte d'Ivoire: Who Are They? Why Did They Fight?" in *Understanding Collective Political Violence*, ed. Yvan Guichaoua (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 21–45.

is created and controlled by another group or state appear to follow a different logic. Even with the removal of secondary support, reputation costs already incurred vis-à-vis the civilian population can inhibit a switch from forced to voluntary recruitment. The only other case I was able to identify in which the rebels used forced recruitment at the outset of the conflict comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Kinshasa (AFDL) and the Congolese Democratic Rally (RCD) both employed forced recruitment from the beginning. While not characterized by the same brutality as the RUF, these groups recruited large numbers of individuals essentially at gunpoint. The AFDL and RCD, however, were not indigenous DRC groups but were created by Rwanda to fight a proxy war. The cores of the groups consisted of a hodgepodge of marginalized individuals and opposition groups led by fighters from the Rwandan army. Together, the DRC and Sierra Leone cases suggest that the arguments presented here are not applicable to rebel groups that are started and maintained as proxies for an outside party's interests. It is important to emphasize that the ambition of this article is theory-building and that the cases are used as plausibility probes to establish the boundaries of where the arguments might be applicable. The arguments should be tested on a larger number of cases to establish their validity. It should also be underscored that complex social processes such as these are surely not uncausal and that while the arguments presented here are hypothesized to increase the probability of forced recruitment, they are not expected to do so in a deterministic fashion.

The Sierra Leone case also suggested that civilians, if pressed hard enough, may seek to overcome the security problems engendered by forced recruitment and the absence of the state at the local level, for example, by forming civilian defense committees. Whether such groups can fundamentally challenge the rebels, as they did in Sierra Leone, or whether they simply evoke greater levels of violence and further entrench the conflict, as has occurred in Naxalite (Communist guerrilla group) areas of India, is a question that deserves further investigation. This article also points to the need to further examine why local populations in rebel-dominated areas sometimes develop self-defense mechanisms to protect against rebel predation, while other times they do not. The incipient literature that systematically studies civil defense forces and peace communities should provide traction on this issue.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Livia Isabella Schubiger, "Dynamics of Resistance: Civil War Violence and Counterinsurgent Mobilization in Peru," paper presented at the Conference on Militias, Paramilitaries, and Civil Defense Forces in Civil Wars, Yale University, 19–20 October 2012; Sabine C. Carey, Neil J. Mitchell, and Will Lowe, "States, the Security Sector, and the Monopoly of Violence: A New Database on Pro-Government Militias," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 2 (March 2013): 249–58; Oliver Kaplan, "Protecting Civilians in Civil War: The Institution of the ATCC in Colombia," *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 3 (May 2013): 351–67.

The empirical narratives also suggest that the connection between recruitment and the resolution of armed conflict warrants more attention. Is the TPLF experience indicative of a larger pattern: are rebel groups that employ voluntary recruitment more likely to succeed militarily? Certainly this article aligns with recent research that suggests that recruitment patterns are endogenous to the dynamics of war, both as *explanans* and as *explanandum*.<sup>104</sup> The Ethiopia narrative also points to the necessity of studying how competitive recruitment environments with more than one rebel group impact on the groups' choice of recruitment tactics.

Theoretically, this article often speaks in terms of a basic dichotomization between coercive and voluntary methods of recruitment, though the gray zone between coercion and freewill where tactics like indoctrination reside has been highlighted. Moreover, while the question of which type of coercion a group adopts (threats of force, drugging, etc.) was beyond the scope of this article, future research should further disaggregate and study the variation in recruitment tactics to understand what drives their adoption. Scholars should also recognize the multiplicity of paths into a rebel group, both coerced and voluntary: there is often a heterogeneity of experiences across a given population of recruits.<sup>105</sup>

The theoretical conjectures developed here should be developed, both empirically and theoretically, in order to establish the extent to which they can be empirically supported and to determine the extent to which they are conditional on various contexts. Moreover, researchers should seek to derive even more precise predictions regarding the timing and location of forced recruitment. Beyond the importance to understanding civil war dynamics, a better understanding of these questions is also of critical policy relevance for civilians inhabiting conflict regions.

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<sup>104</sup> Arjona and Kalyvas, "Recruitment."

<sup>105</sup> Lorenzo Bosi, "Explaining Pathways to Armed Activism in the Provisional Irish Republican Army, 1969–1972," *Social Science History* 36, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 347–90.